

# THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ, OR SONG OF THE BLESSED ONE

BY FRANKLIN EDGERTON .

## CHAPTER VI

### THE NATURE OF GOD

WE HAVE spoken of the metaphysics of the Gītā as dualistic, as recognizing two fundamental principles, the soul and the non-soul (body, or material nature). But it is impossible to read far in the Gītā without finding that this description does not fully represent its author's metaphysics, at least in his most typical mood. It leaves out of account his idea of God, which is as it were superimposed upon the dualistic system outlined in the last chapter.

How does God fit into this system? Is He a sort of third principle, higher than the other two and distinct from them? So we are told at times, perhaps most clearly in the following passage: "There are two *souls*<sup>71</sup> here in the world, a perishable and an imperishable one. The perishable (i. e., material nature) is all beings. The imperishable (i. e., the soul, spirit) is called the Uniform (unchangeable). But there is another, a supreme Soul, called the Highest Spirit (Par-amātmān), the Eternal Lord who enters into the three worlds and supports them."<sup>72</sup> Here the Supreme Soul, God, is definitely set off against the individual soul and matter, as a third principle. Somewhat similarly in another passage, we first have a statement of the ordinary dualism: "This body is called the Field; him who knows it (the soul) those who know the truth call the Field-knower"—which is immediately followed by this: "Know that I (God) am the Field-knower in all Fields."<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> The word used is *purusha*, which elsewhere means strictly "soul" and is not applied to the body or material nature; yet here the "perishable soul" can obviously mean nothing but *prakṛiti*, material nature. This is an example of the loose language which not infrequently confuses the expression of the Gītā's thoughts, and reminds us that we are reading a mystic poem, not a logical treatise on metaphysics.

<sup>72</sup> 15. 16, 17.

<sup>73</sup> 13. 1, 2.

But even in these very passages let it be noted that God, though in a sense something other than either material nature or the individual souls of men, is at the same time regarded as immanent in them. "Whoso sees Me in all and all in Me, for him I am not lost, and he is not lost for Me. Whoso, attaining to (the concept of) oneness, reveres Me as located in all beings, he, the disciplined, though he may abide everywhere (i. e., anywhere), abides in Me." <sup>74</sup> "Attaining to (the concept of) *oneness*!" Thus through its idea of God the Gītā seems after all to arrive at an ultimate monism. The essential part, the fundamental element, in every thing, is after all One—is God. "There is nothing else that is outside of Me; on Me this All is strung like necklaces of pearls on a string." <sup>75</sup> "Also the seed of all beings, that am I. There is no being, moving or motionless, that is without Me." <sup>76</sup> "I am the moisture in the waters, the light in the moon and sun, the sacred syllable Om in all the Vedas, sound in the ether, manliness in men. The goodly odor in the earth am I, and the brilliance in the fire; I am the soul in all beings, and the austerity in ascetics. Know Me as the eternal seed of all creatures. I am the intelligence of the intelligent, the glory of the glorious." <sup>77</sup> God is the animating principle in everything; it is He that "makes the wheels" of the universe "go 'round," that acts in all natural activities and processes: "The Lord resides in the heart of all beings and makes all beings go around by His mysterious power (*māyā*), as if they were fixed on a revolving machine." <sup>78</sup> "The splendor of the sun that illumines the whole world and the splendor that is in the moon and in fire, know that to be My splendor. Entering into the earth I support (all) beings by My power; becoming the juicy soma I make all plants to grow. Becoming fire (as the principle of digestion, regarded by the Hindus as a "cooking" by bodily heat) I enter into the bodies of animate creatures, and, joining with the upper and nether breaths, I digest their food of all four sorts. I have entered into the heart of every man; from Me come memory, knowledge, and negation (in reasoning). I alone am the object of the (sacred) knowledge of all the Vedas; I am the author of the Vedānta (summation of the esoteric doctrines of the Vedas), and I too am the sole knower of the Veda." <sup>79</sup> So, of course, God is repeatedly declared to be the Creator, Supporter, Ruler of all that is; the origin and dissolution of the universe,<sup>80</sup> "both death that

<sup>74</sup> 6.30, 31.<sup>75</sup> 7.7.<sup>76</sup> 10.39.<sup>77</sup> 7.8-10.<sup>78</sup> 18.61<sup>79</sup> 15.12-15.<sup>80</sup> 7.6.

seizes all and the origin of creatures that are to be," <sup>81</sup> "both immortality and death, both the existent and the non-existent," <sup>82</sup> "the beginning and the middle and the end of beings." <sup>83</sup>

Such thoughts lead to the question of the existence of evil and how to reconcile it with the concept of an all-embracing God. Every theistic religion has its difficulties with the problem of evil. In describing the manifestations of God in the universe, the *Gītā*, quite naturally, tends to emphasize the good side of things; but at times it does not shrink from including the evil also. Since *all* comes from God, it seems impossible to deny that origin to anything. "Whatsoever beings (or, states of being) there are, be they of the nature of purity, activity, or dullness (the three *gunas* or qualities of matter, as set forth in the last chapter), know that all of them come from Me alone." <sup>84</sup> In another passage, God is declared to be the source of all mental states and experiences, *good and bad alike*, though the good predominates in the list: "Intelligence, knowledge, freedom from delusion, patience, truth, self-control, peace, pleasure, *pain*, existence (or, presence; or, coming-into-being), lack (non-being, or deficiency), *fear*, and fearlessness too; harmlessness, equanimity, satisfaction, penance, alms, fame, and *disrepute*—the states of creatures, of all various sorts, come from Me alone." <sup>85</sup> More definite recognition of the origin even of evil in God is found in this: "I am the gambling of gamblers, the majesty of the majestic; I am conquest, I am adventure (of conquerors and adventurers); I am the courage of the courageous. . . . I am the violence of conquerors, I am the statecraft of ambitious princes; I too am the silence of the taciturn (or, of silent ascetics), I am the knowledge of the learned." <sup>86</sup>

If even in these passages we seem to find a tendency to slur over the evil of the world and its necessary relation to a quasi-pantheistic God, in other places the *Gītā* feels it necessary to qualify its semi-pantheism by definitely ruling out evil from God's nature. Thus to a passage in the seventh chapter which is strongly suggestive of pantheism, and which I quoted on the preceding page—"I am the moisture in the waters, etc.; I am the intelligence of the intelligent, the glory of the glorious"—there is added this significant verse: "I am the strength of the strong, *free from lust and passion*; I am desire in (all) beings (but) *not* (such desire as is) *opposed to right-*

<sup>81</sup> 10.34.

<sup>82</sup> 9.19.

<sup>83</sup> 10.20, 10.32.

<sup>84</sup> 7.12.

<sup>85</sup> 10.4, 5.

<sup>86</sup> 10.36, 38.

cousness.”<sup>87</sup> Thus the Gītā strengthens its appeal to the natural man, or to “common sense,” at the expense of logic and consistency.

This stricture (if it be considered a stricture) seems to me not unfair, even though I doubt whether it can be said that the Gītā ever commits itself to absolute pantheism. It undoubtedly comes very close to it, as in some of the passages I have quoted. That God is *in* all, or all in God, it frequently says; and hence we may fairly ask whether God is also in that which is evil (or it in Him). But this is not exactly saying that God *is* all, that God is identical with all and all with God, there being no remainder on either side. Such a definitely pantheistic statement is not, I think, to be found in the Gītā. Certainly we find many expressions which seem to deny it. And that in two ways. In the first place, God’s nature may be limited by the exclusion of certain parts of the universe or forms of existence. And secondly, God is thought of as extending beyond the universe, as including more than “allbeings.”

As to the first point, the word “limited” as applied to God’s nature is my own, and would undoubtedly have been strenuously repudiated by the author of the Gītā. He would have said—indeed he does say again and again, in many different ways—that God is limitless, that He includes *all* forms. Yet we have seen that at times he feels compelled to deny that God manifests Himself in certain forms of existence which are felt as morally evil; although at other times he swallows even this dose. Whatever terminology one uses, the fact remains that the Gītā repeatedly manifests a tendency to find God only in the best or highest forms of existence. The worse and lower forms are at least implicitly left out. This tendency is so natural as to be almost inevitable in a writer who is, after all, pervaded by a spirit of ardent, personal theism—however tinged with quasi-pantheism. Philosophically, the doctrine that God is *in* all leaves a loophole which can be stretched to admit a good deal. God is the soul, the essential part of everything; this may be interpreted as meaning the highest or noblest part of everything. Now lay the emphasis on the word *part*, and the trick is turned. Any entity may be regarded as a part of some larger whole, just as any entity (except perhaps, for the time being at least, the modern electron) may be treated as a compound whole and analyzed into parts. By choosing your “whole” and making it sufficiently inclusive, God can be found in some “part” of every “whole,” and yet excused from responsibility for anything that would seem unworthy of Him. I do not accuse the author of the Gītā of deliberately practising such

sophistry. Of course, his mind did not work in that way consciously. But unconsciously I think something like this must have gone on in his thoughts. Otherwise it seems impossible to account for such passages as the long series of verses found in the tenth chapter,<sup>88</sup> in which God is identified with (*only!*) the first, highest, or best, of every conceivable class of beings: "Of lights I am the sun . . . of stars the moon, of Vedas the Sāma Veda, of gods Indra (the king of the old Vedic gods), of sense-organs the mind . . . of mountains Mount Meru," and so forth indefinitely.

On the other hand, the Gītā's theism differs from pantheism also in that it regards God as *more* than the universe. "Whatsoever creature possesses majesty or glory or greatness, know thou that every such creature springs from a *fraction* of My glory. . . . With *one* part of Myself I remain the support of this entire universe."<sup>89</sup> "I am not in them (all beings): they are in Me."<sup>90</sup> "By Me all this world is permeated, by Me whose form is unmanifest. All beings rest in Me; and I do not rest in them."<sup>91</sup> In the next verse after this last, the author retracts even this statement: it is too much to say even that the world is in God: "And (yet) beings do not rest in Me; behold My divine mystery! My nature is the support of beings, and does not rest in beings; it is the cause of being of beings."<sup>92</sup> This idea that the First Principle is more than all existing things, that the universe is only a *part* thereof, is at least as old as the "Purusha" hymn of the Rig Veda,<sup>93</sup> in which the entire universe is derived from only one-quarter of the cosmic Purusha or "Person."

This is by no means the only point in which the Gītā's conception of God shows relationships with older ideas of the First Principle. While, as we have seen, the older speculations, so far as we know them, tend to impersonal and non-theistic formulations of the One, still many of the expressions which they use in describing that One can quite well be applied to a personal God: and they and similar expressions are so applied in the Gītā. Many of the Gītā's descriptions of God sound as if they were taken bodily from the Upanishads. Thus: "Thou art the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Light, the Supreme Purifier; the eternal Purusha ("Person"), the divine, the Primal God, the Unborn Lord."<sup>94</sup> "The eternal Seer, the Governor, finer than an atom . . . the Establisher of all, whose

<sup>88</sup> 10.21-37.<sup>91</sup> 9.4<sup>94</sup> 10.12<sup>89</sup> 10.41, 42.<sup>92</sup> 9.5<sup>90</sup> 7.12.<sup>93</sup> R. V., 10.90.



form is unthinkable, the Sun-colored, who is beyond darkness.”<sup>95</sup> “I am the father of this world, the mother, the creator, the ancestor. . . . The goal, supporter, lord, overseer, dwelling-place, refuge, friend; the beginning, end, abiding-place, treasure-store, the eternal seed (of all).”<sup>96</sup> The term Brahman, favorite expression in the Upanishads for the Absolute, is frequently found in the Gītā; and often it is hard to say whether the author means to identify Brahman with God or not. The fact doubtless is that, as set forth in Chapter IV, the Upanishadic Brahman has contributed largely to the Gītā’s concept of God, which has absorbed it along with other, more theistic elements. As a rule, no clear distinction is made between them. But in one or two places the Gītā shows a realization of a possible difference of opinion as to whether the Supreme is personal or impersonal. And, most interestingly, it definitely recognizes *both* beliefs as leading to salvation,—that is, as in some sense or other true, or at any rate not wholly false; although it prefers the personal theory. “Arjuna said: ‘Those devotees who thus with constant devotion revere Thee, and those who revere the Imperishable, the Unmanifest (i. e., the impersonal Brahman), which of these are the best knowers of discipline?’ The Blessed One replied: ‘Those who fix their minds upon Me and revere Me with constant devotion, pervaded with supreme faith, them I consider the best-disciplined. But those who revere the Imperishable, Indescribable, Unmanifest, Omnipresent, and Unthinkable, the Immovable, Unchangeable, Immutable,—restraining completely all their senses, and keeping their minds indifferent in all circumstances, devoted to the welfare of all creatures,—they too reach Me after all. Greater is the toil for those who fix their minds on the Unmanifest. For the unmanifest path is hard for embodied creatures to attain’.”<sup>97</sup> Could we ask for any clearer proof of the thesis set forth in Chapter IV? The abstract, impersonal Absolute of the Upanishads was more than the mind of the average man could grasp. The Gītā represents a sort of compromise between that speculative religion and popular theology. It provides an “easier way” to salvation, without denying the possibility of salvation to those hardier intellects which chose the more laborious, abstract path. We shall see later that in other ways, too, the Gītā tries to save men the trouble of mental exertion. It is quite characteristic of it to regard intellectual meth-

<sup>95</sup> 8.9.

<sup>96</sup> 9.17, 18.

<sup>97</sup> 12.1-5.

ods as difficult and unnecessary. It is "easier" for the ordinary man to worship a personal, anthropomorphic Deity than to fix his attention on an impersonal Absolute. So the Gītā, while allowing man to choose, recommends the belief in a personal God.

Elsewhere the impersonal Brahman is more or less distinctly subordinated to the personal God. Thus the following description is quite Upanishadic, except for the single phrase in which the Brahman is described as "consisting of Me": "The object of knowledge I will now set forth, knowing which one gains immortality; the beginningless Brahman, *that consists of Me*;<sup>98</sup> it is declared to be neither existent nor non-existent. It has hands and feet on all sides, eyes, heads, and faces on all sides, ears on all sides, in the world; it permanently covers everything. It has the semblance of all the qualities and senses (of material nature), but is free from all the senses; it is unattached, and yet it bears all; it has no qualities, yet it is the enjoyer of the qualities (of material nature). Both without and within all beings; immovable and yet moving; because of its subtility it cannot be known; it is both afar off and near. Both undivided and as it were divided, it resides in (all) beings, and it is to be known as the supporter of beings, causing their destruction and also their creation. It, too, is called the light of lights, that is beyond darkness; knowledge, and the object of knowledge, that is to be reached by knowledge; it is fixed variously in the heart of everyone."<sup>99</sup> The impersonal Brahman is nominally granted all the dignity which the Upanishads claim for it—and yet it depends on the personal God. "For I am the foundation of Brahman!"<sup>100</sup> Other passages in which the Brahman is spoken of as the Supreme Soul, the One that is in all creatures, or the "Possessor-of-the-Field," leave us more or less uncertain as to just how the author would have formulated his thought if hard pressed. "When one perceives that the various estates of creatures are all fixed in One, and that it is just from that One that they spread out, then he attains Brahman. Because it is without beginning and without qualities, this eternal supreme Soul (*ātman*), even though it resides in the body, does not act, nor is it stained (affected, by actions). As the omnipresent ether, because of its subtility, is not stained, so the Soul, residing in every body, is not stained. As the one sun illumines this whole

<sup>98</sup> Literally, "having Me as the chief (element?)"; it is hard to determine the precise *nuance* of the phrase, but it seems to me to imply some subordination of the Brahman to "Me" (God).

<sup>99</sup> 13.12-17.

<sup>100</sup> 14.27.

world, so the Possessor-of-the-Field illumines the whole Field (material body)."<sup>101</sup> Is this impersonal, Upanishadic monism? Or is the One implicitly thought of under a personal, theistic guise? Or, as in the foregoing, is God the "foundation" of It? In a preceding verse<sup>102</sup> we were told that "I (God) am the Field-knower in all Fields"; this suggests that the "Possessor-of-the-Field" is conceived as the personal God. Again: "But higher than this (world of perishable beings) is another, eternal being . . . which perishes not when all beings perish. It is called the unmanifest, the eternal; they call it the final goal, which having attained they do not return; *it is My supreme station (or, light)*. This supreme soul (*purusha*) is to be attained by single devotion; within it all beings rest; by it this universe is pervaded."<sup>103</sup> Again, we might think that we were reading a non-theistic Upanishad, but for the little phrase, "it is My supreme station (or, light)." Does this mean something else than that "Brahman is God"? Let the mystic answer. The fact seems to be that the author subconsciously avoids careful definition of these terms. Or, to put it otherwise, he does not feel able to get rid of the Upanishadic Absolute, but he strives, doubtless unconsciously, to color it with his personal theism.

Elsewhere the idea of man as a dualism, a combination of "soul" and "body" or "material nature," leads to a macrocosmic dualism in which God, the Soul of the Universe, is set over against the cosmic or universal Prakriti, "Material Nature" as a whole, which is then thought of as *God's body*, as it were—God's material nature. So God too is dualistic; He has a double nature, a "lower" or material, and a "higher" or spiritual. "Earth, waters, fire, wind, ether, mind, will, and self-consciousness: thus is divided My material nature, eight-fold. This is (My) lower (nature). But know My other nature, higher than that. It is the Soul by which this world is sustained."<sup>104</sup> And just as the material nature of man confuses and deceives him, so that he thinks that what is really matter is himself (his soul), so he confuses God's body—manifest material nature—with God's unmanifest Self. "Deluded by these conditions of existence, that consist of the Three Qualities (*gunas*, of material nature), this whole world fails to know Me, who am superior to them and eternal. For this is My divine illusion (*māyā*, trick, piece of jugglery), consisting of the (three) qualities, hard to overcome. Those who devote themselves solely to Me escape this illusion."<sup>105</sup> "Fool-

<sup>101</sup> 13.30-33.<sup>102</sup> 13.2.<sup>103</sup> 8.20-22.<sup>104</sup> 7.4, 5.<sup>105</sup> 7.13, 14.



ish men think of Me, the Unmanifest, as having become manifest. They do not know My higher nature, everlasting and supreme.”<sup>106</sup>

The adherents of the Vedānta philosophy interpret such passages as meaning that material nature is “illusion” (*māyā*) in the sense that it does not really exist. I believe they are wrong. The *Gītā* only means that the Soul—universal Soul or God as well as individual soul—is utterly distinct from material nature or body; the “illusion” consists in the apparent blending of the two. The wise man should realize the distinction; but this does not imply the non-existence of either. In my opinion the word *māyā* did not acquire its Vedāntic sense of “world-mirage” until long after the *Gītā*’s time. The reality of material nature is clearly indicated in many passages in the *Gītā*. Thus it accepts the doctrine of evolution and devolution of all nature at the beginning and end of successive world-eons, a theory which is familiar in Hindu cosmogonic speculations, and makes God the “overseer” of the process, and *His* material nature the world-stuff out of which all material creatures evolve and into which they devolve. “All beings go to My material nature at the end of an eon, and again at the beginning of (the next) eon I send them forth again. Resorting to My material nature, I send forth again and again this whole number of beings, involuntarily (that is, by a natural law, not by special interference), by the power of (My) material nature. . . . With Me as overseer, material nature creates the world of moving and unmoving beings. This is the cause by which the world revolves.”<sup>107</sup> This same process of successive creations in successive eons is alluded to elsewhere<sup>108</sup> and is there treated as wholly material, not even as supervised by the Supreme Soul, which however is mentioned in the following verses<sup>109</sup> as “higher than all that”; He does not perish when all beings perish at the end of an eon. But there is no suggestion in any of these passages that material nature is in any sense unreal.

In another very curious and interesting passage this creative activity is conceived as a sexual relation between God, as the Supreme Soul (the male principle), and the female principle of inert or receptive matter. Instead of an evolution of beings out of matter independently of the Supreme Soul, or with Him merely as “overseer” of the process, the Supreme Soul or God “plants the germ” in the womb of nature, and from this union all beings evolve. But here—most curiously—the cosmic matter is not called by the

<sup>106</sup> 7. 24.<sup>107</sup> 9. 7, 8, 10.<sup>108</sup> 8. 18, 19.<sup>109</sup> 8. 20-22.

usual name of Prakriti, material nature, as we should expect<sup>110</sup> (although this term would be peculiarly appropriate to such a connection, since the word *prakriti* is grammatically of the feminine gender), but instead is called *Brahman*, which has neuter gender! "My womb is the great Brahman; in it I plant the germ. Thence comes the generation of all creatures. Whatsoever forms are generated in all wombs, of them Brahman is the great womb (mother); I am the father that furnishes the seed."<sup>111</sup> Brahman is used as an equivalent for Prakriti, material nature, in another passage also: "Whoso lays his actions upon Brahman and does his acts while avoiding attachment (or interest in the results; compare Chapter VII), to him evil does not cling, as water clings not to a lotus-leaf."<sup>112</sup> The context shows unmistakably that Brahman here can only mean "material nature," the "non-soul," which is, as we have already seen, solely responsible for all actions. In these passages a strange fate has overtaken the Upanishadic Brahman. Originally the Soul of the universe, it has been so far degraded as to be definitely deprived of all spirituality, and identified with the inert cosmic Matter, which is precisely all that is *not* Soul. No more significant indication could be found of the Gītā's personal theism. For nothing could be clearer than the reason for this dethronement of the Brahman. It was impersonal; and so, logically, it must either make way for, or be absorbed by, the personal God of the Gītā. Of these two alternatives, the Gītā, with the catholicity of the true mystic, chooses both, and neither. As we have seen in this chapter, Brahman (1) is absorbed into God, who assumes all its characteristics; (2) is differentiated from God and placed in some sort of subordinate position to Him, or made a lower manifestation of Him; and (3) still at times retains its ancient prestige as the Absolute, the One-in-All. All these positions appear side by side in the Gītā. Often its references to the Brahman are so vague as to leave us in doubt as to just how the author was thinking of it for the moment.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>110</sup> And, be it noted, as later speculations call it; for this same sexual figure is used in later philosophy.

<sup>111</sup> 14.3, 4.

<sup>112</sup> 5.10.

<sup>113</sup> There is no clear indication that the Gītā knew the concept of the Trimūrti, the supreme triad consisting of Brahmā (as a masculine deity, the Creator-God), Vishnu, and Shiva, which is familiar in later Hinduism. Only once does the word Brahman in the Gītā have masculine gender unmistakably; in some of its occurrences the forms are ambiguous and could be either masculine or neuter, but when unambiguous it is always neuter except in a single instance. In that one occurrence the god Brahmā is mentioned merely as one of the numerous beings that appear mystically manifested in the vision of the Deity's supreme form as revealed to Arjuna, in the eleventh chapter.

The whole material universe is, then, in some sense God's manifest form or material nature. But of far greater practical importance, for the development of the religion taught by the Gītā, is this further fact, that God, by the exercise of his *māyā* or "mysterious power," can and does take on empiric, personal existence as an individual being in the world of beings. "Though I am unborn and everlasting in nature, though I am the Lord of Beings, I enter into my own material nature and take on (empiric) being, by my own mysterious power."<sup>114</sup> This is of course a cardinal doctrine of the Gītā. Krishna, the principal speaker in the dialog, is himself such an incarnation of the Deity. He is not the only one; God appears upon earth again and again, to accomplish His purposes. And His purposes are expressed in the following famous verses: "For whenever religion languishes, and irreligion shows its head, then I create Myself. To save the righteous, to destroy the wicked, to establish religion, I come into being from age to age."<sup>115</sup> God condescends to become man Himself, for the benefit of mankind. This is the beginning of the famous system of *avatārs* or incarnations of God, which became so characteristic of later Vishnuism and a prime source of its strength. No Christian community needs to be told how such a doctrine of a loving God who is born upon earth to save the world can conquer the hearts of men.

Of course, God appears in such an incarnation not in His true, supernal form. That form is not only invisible to the eye of man, or even of the (popular) "gods," but also unknowable to their minds. "I know all beings that have been, that are, and that shall be; but no one knows Me."<sup>116</sup> "The companies of the gods know not My origin, nor the great seers (*ṛishis*); for I am the origin of the gods and the great seers altogether."<sup>117</sup> None but God Himself knows Himself, says Arjuna: "All this I hold to be true, that Thou tellest me; for neither gods nor demons know Thy manifestation, O Blessed One. Thou Thyself alone knowest Thyself by Thyself, O Supreme Spirit, Animator of Creatures, Lord of Creatures, God of Gods, Lord of the World."<sup>118</sup> But as a special act of grace, granted to the few whom God elects, and who serve Him with pure devotion, He may reveal His Supreme form. This He does to Arjuna, in the famous eleventh chapter of the Gītā, the climax of the poem—after

<sup>114</sup> 4, 6.<sup>115</sup> 4, 7, 8.<sup>116</sup> 7, 26.<sup>117</sup> 10, 2.<sup>118</sup> 10, 14, 15

first giving him a supernatural power of sight, since his natural eye could not behold the marvel.<sup>119</sup> The mystic vision is revealed by a pure act of God's grace. No amount of pious rites and performances can win it; it is granted only to the chosen of God, and, we are told, to Arjuna first of all mankind. "I in My grace have shown thee, Arjuna, this supreme form of Mine, by My own mysterious power; this majestic, universal, endless, beginningless form, which has not been seen before by any other than thee. Not by Vedic sacrifices and study, nor by almsgiving or rites or severe penance, can I be seen in this form by any other than thee in the world of men."<sup>120</sup> As to what Arjuna saw—of course, words fail utterly to describe it. It is the mystic's direct vision of God. The greater part of the eleventh chapter of the *Gītā* is devoted to the confessedly vain attempt to describe this indescribable. The ecstatic language of the description is hard to transfer to another tongue. Even in externals the passage differs from its surroundings; instead of the sober meter of most of the poem, it breaks forth into more elaborate lyric measures, which Sir Edwin Arnold imitates in his English version. The vision is described as "made up of all marvels."<sup>121</sup> "If the light of a thousand suns should suddenly burst forth in the sky, such would be His glory."<sup>122</sup> "Arjuna beheld the whole world there united, and yet infinitely divided, in the form of the God of Gods."<sup>123</sup> Therein were contained all creatures, the gods (*Brahmā*<sup>124</sup> and the rest), all the seers, the supernatural race of serpents, and all other beings;<sup>125</sup> there was neither beginning nor middle nor end to His form;<sup>126</sup> the sun and moon are His eyes, His face is flaming fire, He illumines the whole world with His radiance.<sup>127</sup> And so on. We recognize the type of ecstasy which so many mystics of all times and lands have told of, and which, they all agree, can only be realized at first hand, not described in terms comprehensible to another unless the other be a brother-mystic who has himself enjoyed the experience.

<sup>119</sup> 11.8

<sup>120</sup> 11.47, 48.

<sup>121</sup> 11.11.

<sup>122</sup> 11.12.

<sup>123</sup> 11.13.

<sup>124</sup> Here occurs the only unmistakable reference to the masculine God *Brahmā* that is found in the *Gītā*.

<sup>125</sup> 11.15.

<sup>126</sup> 11.16.

<sup>127</sup> 11.19.